

Questions a Worldview Seeks to Answer (Part I)

Our Daily Bread University
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Our Daily Bread University.



What is real?



Even though we all live in the same world and time, our varying worldviews can profoundly change the way we interpret who we are and what we are doing here. The windows through which we look at our world and one another can give us radically different answers to the same basic questions:

What is real?

Often when sorting out a problem we might say, “Let’s do a reality check.” Interestingly, this is the starting point for each worldview.

Monotheism and Reality

All three monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—see reality in terms of a sovereign Creator who is involved with His world. Each assumes the existence of God, an eternal Spirit being, who has created both a material and a spiritual reality. The objective world of matter is there to be observed. God’s special revelation, however, is required to know about the spiritual realities of heaven, angels, the devil, and the afterlife. Monotheists regard as real what they observe in nature and understand from their religious writings.

Deism and Reality

Deists proceed from the assumption that an orderly universe exists. They see its First Cause as a Creator who does not guide its movements, intervene in human affairs, or answer prayers. Their pursuit of what is real comes through reason and sound inquiry. They do not take seriously any revelation that portrays the miraculous. Their reality is limited to nature.



Who am I?

Naturalism and Reality

The naturalist assumes that matter is all that exists and is best investigated through the scientific method. Unlike deism, it does not hold to God as a First Cause for the universe. Because matter is the only thing that can be measured under repeatable laboratory conditions, it is the only thing we can be sure of. Naturalists believe that matter is real and that spirit is not.

Nihilism and Reality

The nihilist believes that we cannot know objective truth or moral values with any certainty. Adopting a strong skepticism, the nihilist rejects what are traditionally held truth-claims about reality. At best, even scientific experiments and the records of history are inaccurate and irrelevant distortions of what is claimed to be “real.”

Existentialism and Reality

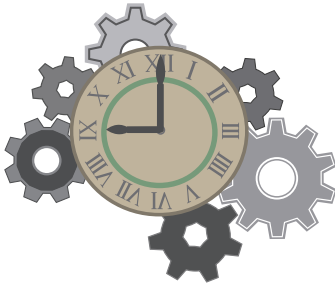
Atheistic existentialists view the external cosmos as real. Their problem, however, is that they find it to be ultimately absurd and meaningless. Subjective experience is the only way to arrive at meaning that is relevant to the individual. Although the existentialist believes the objective world exists, he sees no objective reason for existing.

Pantheism and Reality

The term pantheism comes from the Greek words *pan* for “all or everything” and *theos* for God. In other words, “everything is God.” Eastern pantheism, popularized by the New Age Movement, assumes that one impersonal spiritual force constitutes reality. Pantheists believe that Spirit is the ultimate reality and that matter is an illusion.

The view of reality may vary from one worldview to the next. But what can they tell us about personal identity?

Who am I?



Identity theft has become a real concern for our generation. The threat of someone stealing our name, social security number, date of birth, and citizenship is a serious misuse of who we are. Yet a worldview seeks to answer the question of “Who am I?” on a much deeper level.

Monotheism and Identity

Monotheists are in agreement that human beings are made in the image of God but are morally flawed and in need of redemption. For the Jew, this means keeping the law and its traditions. The Christian believes in redemption through faith in Christ’s atoning death and resurrection. The Muslim advocates submitting to the will of Allah and obeying the Koran.

Deism and Identity

Deists believe that man is a personal being who is part of the “clockwork universe.” He is not abnormal or fallen but is as he is supposed to be. Freedom to explore nature will lead to self-knowledge and understanding of the impersonal God who set up the universe.

Naturalism and Identity

Naturalists view humans as a highly developed animal who possesses self-consciousness, reason, and conscience. They believe that humans are highly complex biological “machines” who have physical and mental capabilities not yet fully known.



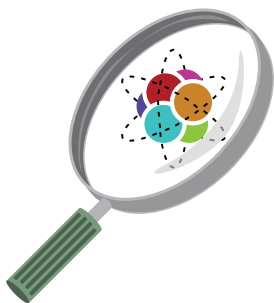
Nihilism and Identity

Awash in a sea of uncertainty, nihilists have no clear, lasting identity. Their own understanding is biased and limited. But they do assume that an identity applied to them by traditional institutions and religious values is bogus and to be rejected.

Existentialism and Identity

Existentialists believe that because humans have self-

Where did I come from?



consciousness and reason, we must define who and what we are. With no credible external source to give identity, we must subjectively invent who we are. No one else can do this for us.

Pantheism and Identity

The pantheistic view of identity is holistic. My little soul is part of the big Soul of the universe. Through meditation, each of us can experience becoming one with the cosmos. When we achieve this state of enlightenment, our personality and the external world of matter will disappear.

Worldviews establish identity through various means: God, evolution, our own search for meaning, or other sources. But how do these different windows on the world explain where we come from?

Where did I come from?

When getting to know someone, we often ask the question, “Where are you from?” What usually follows is a brief description of our hometown and the family in which we grew up. But sometimes, in our private moments, we may ask ourselves the ultimate question of origin, “Did I have a Creator, was I the result of evolution, or did I have some other origin?”

Monotheism and Origins

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would all agree that our universe was created by a personal God. Our original ancestors were created to be in relationship with God, but they and their offspring chose to go their own independent way. Being reconciled to our Creator requires faith and obedience to His revealed truth to us.

Deism and Origins

The orderliness of the known universe argues in favor of an intelligent designer as First Cause. This God has set up the laws of motion in the cosmos like an intelligent clockmaker who winds up a clock and leaves it to run on its own. The deist believes that our origin is traceable back through the generations to an impersonal God.



Naturalism and Origins

Many naturalists believe that the known universe likely exploded into existence over 15 billion years ago. They believe that the process of evolution began about 5 billion years ago with the formation of amino acids, the first cell, and then lower species adapting into more complex ones. Naturalists believe that humans are the closest kin to the monkey, and just one of many primates.

Nihilism and Origins

Nihilists believe that history has been shown to be unreliable. Even if the scientific theory of evolution were true, they assume that all it would mean is that human beings have a highly developed monkey brain that is, at best, unreliable. The nihilist holds the view that origins are under “a great cloud of unknowing.”

Existentialism and Origins

If we assume there is no God, we most likely have appeared on the scene as conscious beings from evolution. But unlike lower life-forms, we cry out for a meaning that does not exist. If we believe in some kind of Creator, the past is still irrelevant to our personal significance. Even the texts of religion are filled with “paradoxes” that can complicate our current life experience.

Pantheism and Origins

Pantheism teaches that the soul that dwells within our human body has come from numerous reincarnations. Reincarnation (literally “to be made flesh again”) means that some essential part of a living being (soul or spirit) survives death to be reborn in a new body.

Worldviews offer a variety of explanations for our ultimate origin. But when it comes to the meaning of life, there is even more diversity of opinion. Worldviews offer a variety of explanations for our ultimate origin. But when it comes to the meaning of life, there is even more diversity of opinion.